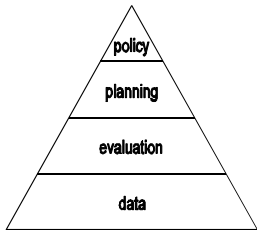


Digest of A Performance Audit of Criminal Justice Planning in Utah

Chapter I — Criminal Justice Policy Development



The criminal justice system is one of the most expansive and complex systems in the public policy arena. The challenging task of implementing effective criminal justice policy is complicated by the interplay both of government branches— executive, judicial, and legislative— and government levels— federal, state, and local. The system’s challenges cannot be met with quick fixes and simple solutions. Rather, a systemic view— a discussion of how to fix system processes— should drive changes. Because we were asked specifically to review how criminal justice policy is developed in the state, we introduce a framework to facilitate a more systemic view of criminal justice processes and policy development. We refer to this model as the Policy Development Pyramid. Policy development flows up a pyramid whose foundation consists of quality, accessible data, moving next to a level of crime analysis and program evaluation, which feeds a system-wide strategic planning process. Ultimately, this process narrows (as illustrated by the pyramid in the left margin) until a workable list of policy options can be presented to the Legislature.

Chapter II — Criminal Justice Data Can Improve

Criminal justice data must improve to provide a solid foundation for policy development. We reviewed two criminal justice data collection systems which compile data state-wide: crime reporting and criminal history. Although reported crime data is adequate to indicate general crime trends, we have some concerns with the data. The concerns include the use of two data reporting formats, instances of non-reporting, and the use of different crime classifications. In the computerized criminal history (CCH), which is a central repository of data from many sources, we found that some important and required pieces of data, such as arrest information and case dispositions, are often missing from the records. Thus, background checks by criminal justice agencies, private employers, and other users may be affected. We believe improvements in the two data systems are needed to provide policymakers with critical information to understand and respond to crime problems.

Chapter III — Utah May Need Additional Resources Devoted to Evaluation

In addition to improving criminal justice data systems, the Legislature should consider enhancing the state’s ability to evaluate crime and offender data. Existing resources appear adequate to analyze general crime trends and study “best practices” in the criminal justice system. In fact, much of

the work done at these two levels of research has identified programs that the Legislature could now help to implement in Utah, such as problem-oriented policing and crime mapping. More in-depth evaluation of the causes of crime or the effectiveness of Utah's criminal justice programs, however, may require more resources in the form of data and research personnel. A few states are providing more in-depth program evaluation from various sources to their legislatures who then make direct decisions on program funding. We believe the Legislature in Utah could also benefit from more in-depth program evaluation as it makes criminal justice policy.

Chapter IV — Utah Needs a System-Wide Criminal Justice Strategic Plan

Following improvements to criminal justice data systems and evaluation, Utah needs to formalize the data and evaluation into a criminal justice plan in accordance with the Commission on Criminal and Juvenile Justice's (CCJJ's) duty "to provide a comprehensive criminal justice plan annually." Although CCJJ should develop this strategic plan, it should begin not with its own mission but with the mission of the criminal justice system. Similarly, even though CCJJ lacks authority over criminal justice agencies, the plan should advocate actions and policy recommendations for the system as a whole, based on the input of all criminal justice agencies. In our opinion, such a written plan is essential so CCJJ can promote broad philosophical agreement about the objectives of the criminal and juvenile justice system and provide effective policy recommendations to the Legislature. We believe the very process of formalizing a comprehensive criminal justice strategic plan will help further internalize strategic thinking and results-orientation within the criminal justice system.

Chapter V — Utah Legislature Has Policy Options in Criminal Justice

The Policy Development Pyramid suggests that criminal justice agencies provide sound policy input to the Legislature by beginning with quality data which is thoroughly evaluated and then incorporated into a strategic planning process. Policy options emerging from this model in the criminal justice system which are presented to lawmakers are to:

- determine whether organizational changes are needed to better assist the Legislature with crime policy development,
- encourage a more comprehensive strategic planning process by amending CCJJ's statutory duties,
- provide additional funding to analyze crime causes and evaluate the impact of criminal justice programs, and
- enhance oversight of criminal justice data systems, including improved training of data submitters and monitoring of data quality.